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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - TFG ATTACKS IN MOGADISHU, ROBOW RESIGNS  
POST

REF: LTC JOACHIM 5/20 EMAIL

1. (SBU) Summary. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) launched its long-promised offensive in Mogadishu in the early morning hours of May 22. After impressive initial gains, al-Shabaab and its allies pushed back. However, as of early afternoon (local), the TFG reportedly remained in the "plus" column for the day as fighting continued. It is not clear to Embassy at this juncture what role AMISOM played in the fighting, how many casualties resulted from the urban warfare, and what the TFG or al-Shabaab had planned for May 23. End summary.

2. (SBU) Post has received word that in the early hours of May 22 Transitional Federal Government forces and allied militia launched an offensive against Islamist-held positions. Initial reports from multiple contacts are conflicting. The offensive, which is ongoing as of late morning, may have succeeded in recapturing key parts of central Mogadishu, including important intersections northwest of Bakara Market and a strategic police station in lower Wardhigley. Earlier gains in some Hawl-Wadag neighborhoods were lost to al-Shabaab counterattacks following fighting in Bakara Market.

3. (SBU) Reached on phone on the morning of May 22, Prime Minister Omar Sharmarke confirmed TFG forces were gaining ground but the situation was fluid. He asked for our help resupplying TFG forces with RPG rounds and PKM (machine gun) ammunition. We recommended he contact the AMISOM force commander, who could respond most quickly. We have also passed this request to Ambassador Nicholas Bwakira at the AMISOM political office in Nairobi and to Embassy Uganda. The Embassy Uganda's defense attache has previously contacted the Ugandan defense ministry regarding ammunition resupply to the TFG (ref email)

4. (SBU) Separately, on May 21 Mukhtar Robow announced to media without explanation that he had resigned his position as al-Shabaab Spokesman. With him was his replacement as spokesman, Ali Mohamud Raage "Ali Dheere" (Hawiye/Abgal), whom he introduced. His resignation may signal a significant break with al-Shabaab chief Ahmed Abdi aw-Mohamed "Godane aka Abu Zubeyr". Many in al-Shabaab criticized Robow after he gave safe passage out of Baidoa to TFG ministers and other allied warlords after he had captured the town in January 2009. Robow was said to have allowed them safely to leave Baidoa because they were from the same Rahanweyn clan. Robow also may have broken with al-Shabaab leadership to soften his stance on certain humanitarian agencies' access to Bay and

Bakool regions, according to our contacts.

15. (SBU) It still is unclear if Robow remains in al Shabaab. One contact confirmed he was returned to Baidoa early May 22, along with his personal bodyguards. Another source speculated he may increase his cooperation with Ras Kamboni leader Hassan al-Turki and Hassan Dahir Aweys.  
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